

Cranbrook School visit the Tabora Region, July 2011

When we all left for Tanzania in July, we weren't sure what to expect. Though we had been forewarned, experiences like the day long coach journey, the dirt roads and the toilets still hit us. However, equally so did the beauty of the savannah, the exhilaration of riding on the roof a truck (illegally!), and the friendliness of the people we met out there.

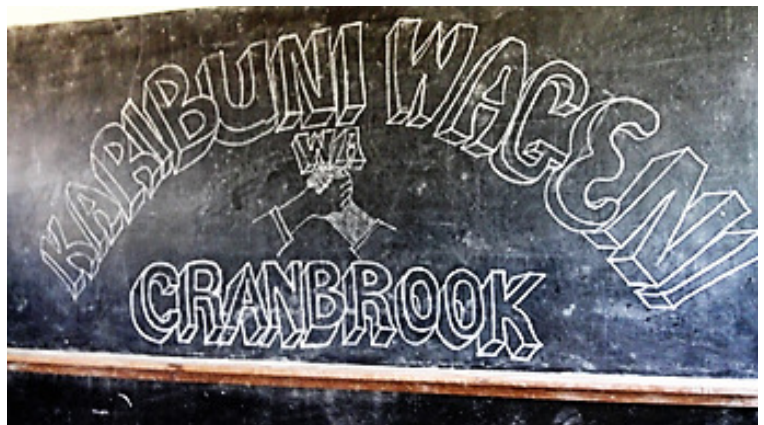
Tired and stiff, we landed in Dar Es Salaam on the 12th of July, and after changing our money into what seemed like ludicrously large sums, travelled to the Salvation Army Hostel where we would be staying.



There, we met at first a small group of children, which eventually grew into a crowd, all playing with our cameras and talking with us. Considering it was our first time trying to communicate over a language barrier, we all adapted well, and soon decided on the games that worked best; the hokey cokey is always a delight, and for the month I couldn't get the tune of "heads, shoulder knees and toes" out of my head!

The coach the next day was bumpy, dusty and long, and though we cheered ourselves along singing and chatting, we were glad to reach Tabora at midnight! In Tabora we were welcomed by the Regional Commissioner and Regional Administrative Secretary, then an afternoon school visit and supper at the homes of FUM friends there; we were never short of food! Less than two days after arriving however, we had our last showers for three weeks in the wonderful Tabora hotel and split off into our separate groups, Urambo group with Mr MacDonald, Mwanhala group with Mr Hamilton and Mrs Taylor, both on trucks, and Sikonge group, my group, with Mr Smith, squeezed into two jeeps with 17 mattresses on top!

In Sikonge we were warmly greeted by Mr Mguba our host at the FDC, and soon began to work on refurbishing the offices and classrooms in need, as well as some ladies' toilets and showers. This work took us just under a week, during which time we were visited by the District Commissioner, learnt the risks of paint fume inhalation and made some fast friends with the students. The



Urambo group worked on dormitories and the girls' latrines at the FDC and in Mwanhala the groups undertook the task of rewiring some of the dormitories and main block, as well as repainting.

After finishing our painting in FDCs, we gathered our things and moved on to our village projects; Sikonge's project was in Utimule, on the edge of Forest Reserve. The Sikonge group travelled on a truck with all of our luggage and mattresses, feeling more experienced and confident, and with excitement and much paint already in my hair. Utimule was a quiet village, pleasantly surprised I think at our work and appearance, and we quickly realised that life in the villages was very different from in the town – not least because it was so cold in the mornings! We also had more to do, as some of the students from

the FDC had come with us and we planned to re-floor several classrooms in the Primary school with concrete, repaint most, redecorate the outside of the buildings. This was a big task, but the whole group really worked hard to complete it, and although we spent considerable time cleaning before painting, we managed to paint a room a day, with walls, blackboards and windows fixed, later adding murals in each room, planting shade trees and even repainting the marker stones each side of the paths.



After work ended each day, we would sit around a camp fire after supper, chatting and learning “Tanzania Tanzania”, or go and have astronomy lessons with Mr Smith on the football pitch. The Urambo group went to Ibambo where the clinic was unfortunately not ready for them to paint, mainly due to the lack of rains this year, so they undertook a similar project at the local primary school, specialising in scientific diagrams on the walls and lovely landscape murals. The

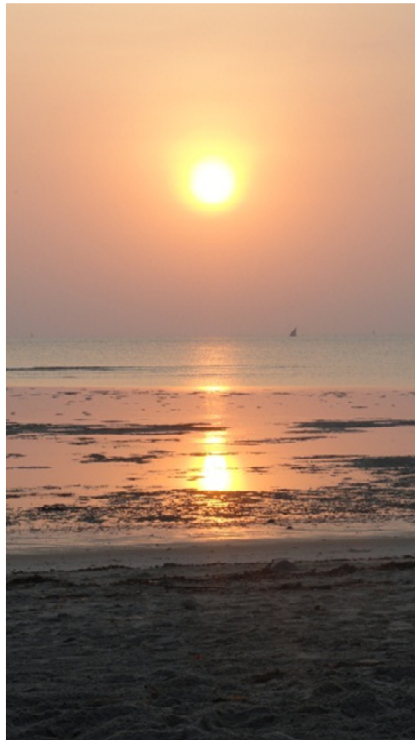
Mwanhala group travelled to Mbooga where they completely refurbished the Clinic and Dispensary; the same clinic that a group in 1999, led by Mrs Taylor, had helped to build.

These projects completed we (the Sikonge Group) returned to our FDC for our grand farewell. It was a really emotional evening actually, as we all gave gifts to the people who had looked after us, like Mama Kuliama, received kangas and shirts from our hosts, and said goodbye to the friends we had made. The Sikonge and Urambo groups then travelled to the Mwanhala FDC (after the Urambo group had had a similar ceremony of their own, in which the girls received some lovely homemade dresses and the boys received Tanzanian shirts), for the last big celebration of our visit, and possibly Mr Smith’s last ever visit to Tanzania with Cranbrook School. This party was long, vibrant and involved quite a lot of singing and dancing, and was, we all hoped, an excellent last hurrah for Mr Smith.





The last week of the trip we spent meandering back to Dar, reunited and once more on our beloved coach; first stop, Mikumi. The game park was brilliant in several ways – firstly, the luxuries of running water, electricity and fans were back, and I don't think I had ever missed them more, but more importantly in that we were able to see (and take countless photographs of) the beautiful landscape and wildlife of Tanzania. I myself took over 200 photos that day, of the incredible elephants, hipopotami, zebras, giraffes and others. Moving on, we went up into the Morogoro Mountains, where we were greeted by a gorgeous stream, our first rain drop as we laid out our mattresses refreshing and rejuvenating – with lush foliage or, with the company of the teachers, go on one of two trips down to the market, although I think that more food was bought than anything else, as we stumbled upon Ribena, Nutella and Pringles! The best part of the mountains was undoubtedly so much fun, and incredibly the river, which was freezing, but refreshing, especially if you braved we also celebrated two birthdays, enormous campfire, before packing our bags once again and travelling to the beach resort at Bagomoyo.



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Bagomoyo was blissful, with sun, sea and Indian Ocean sunrises which were to die for. We spent our days there at the local markets, on the beach or at the pool, and other than a few technical hitches (my shower gave me a mild electric shock) our time was fairly idyllic, and though it was highly enjoyable, many of us were ready now to return home to bore our families with our tales.

We spent nearly five weeks in Tanzania where we learned such a lot – about the country, the people and ourselves. Some say it has been a life changing experience, but all say they had a brilliant time and are truly glad they went.

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